

Belmont Human Rights Commission  
Belmont Town Hall  
November 2, 2006

## Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Janet Cudmore-Boswell, Laurie Graham, Cheryl Morrissey, Moez Rawji, Connie Williams, Fran Yuan (Chair)

Members Absent: Cynthia Bannon, Judi Feins, Rosalind Kabrhel, Donna Ruvolo

Guests and Liaisons Present: Hildy Dvorak (Council on Aging), Lt. Peter Hoerr (Belmont Police Department), Trish Lohmar (Belmont Resident, Guest)

Guest Speakers: David Harris: Managing Director for the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute on Race and Justice at the Harvard Law School and past director of Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston.

Aviva Rothman-Shore, Outreach and Policy Coordinator, Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston.

1. The meeting began at 7:08 p.m.
2. The minutes of the October meeting were amended and approved.
3. No Place to Hate Sign: Fran reported that she is seeking a location to place a sign that indicates that Belmont is a No Place to Hate community. Members were in agreement that along Concord Avenue as one enters Belmont would be a suitable location. Placement near the Library was mentioned as one possible location. Fran will pursue approval for placement of a sign near the Temple. Moez raised the question as to whether or not such signs worked. Fran suggested that we put up a sign for a year and see what feedback we get.
4. New HRC members: The Commission is short of members. Fran reported that we will strive to have an appointed body of eleven (11).
5. Phone Line for receiving complaints: Cheryl Morrissey checked the line every two days since our last meeting. For the next month, Cheryl will continue to check the phone line.
6. Fran introduced David Harris, chair of the Medford HR Commission and former chair of Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston. A summary of David's remarks follows:

Background: The Fair Housing Center was formed in 1998 to combat discrimination and create open communities. In the decade preceding its formation, the practice of segregation in Boston in public housing was documented. Litigation followed. The Boston Housing Authority, as a result of the settlement of the Jane Doe case, was required to engage in efforts to create neighborhoods more accepting of integrated housing.

The Federal Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968. Fairness is the core value underpinning the legislation which prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, national origin, gender, or religion. The law was amended in 1988 to include family status and disability.

Fair Housing Center: The work of the Center is guided by Chapter 151B - The Civil Rights Statute. Programs/Activities are developed in four areas:

- (1) Education and Outreach assures that rights and responsibilities are known to home seekers and realtors.
- (2) Enforcement is carried out through testing. Matched pair testing consists of sending two people who are the same in all ways except for the attribute for which you are testing, for example, discrimination based on race or number of children.

(3) Public Policy Analysis and Advocacy, excluding lobbying which is not permitted because of non-profit status. The goal of this program area is to determine the extent to which fair housing is enhanced or inhibited. An Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing document defines parameters for a plan of action.

(4) Research is done through testing and audits in rental, sales, and mortgage markets. Rental audits document presence or absence of discrimination bases on race, national origin, source of income, e.g., Section 8, or families with children. Implementation is related to the receipt of federal dollars.

**Affordability:** There is a widespread belief that the major impediment to open housing is affordability. Research dispels this belief. Documentation shows that 49% of minorities buying housing in the Boston area were found to buy in seven (7) towns along the North/South corridor. In 80% of cities and towns, the number of Black and Latino residents was half what was predicted based on affordability alone. Other factors, such as minorities reporting that they did not feel welcomed, must be considered. A 2003 case of the denial by a white landlord to rent a Belmont property to a black engineer was called to our attention. Clearly, affordability was not a factor in this case. Several members of the Commission were familiar with the case. David passed out a copy of a Boston Globe story reporting on the settlement of the case.

At this point in the presentation, our focus turned to what we might do in Belmont.

Belmont is a member of the Metro-West Consortium which is required to do an audit. A section of the audit focuses on Belmont. Our second speaker, Aviva Rothman-Shore, who recently joined the staff of the Fair Housing Center in the position of Outreach and Policy Coordinator, suggested that an audit is not the best place for a community to begin. Aviva recommends education and outreach, using relevant documents such as More Than Money and a video, The Power of Illusion. These could be the basis of an education program during Fair Housing month in April. The Center partners with communities. For example, if we had a complaint of discrimination, we could refer the complainant to the Fair Housing Center.

Another way that we could take action is to participate in a budget initiative. The state does not invest anything in fair housing. If the state allocated dollars to support a person to do fair housing work, such a person could be a resource to cities and towns.

David, before turning the discussion over to Aviva, referred back to the question Moez raised about the efficacy of the No Place to Hate Sign. He suggested that one way of making such a sign real may be to do what Newton did and apply to HUD for funds for training realtors. Hildy suggested that making people aware of their behavior is a good place to begin. Hildy's employer requires all real estate agents to go through training on fair housing laws.

7. After the speakers left, we turned to the other items on the agenda. There was not ample time to reflect on the substantive presentations we had heard. A number of members expressed concern that we moved onto other agenda items without allowing time for discussion. We agreed that when we have a speaker, we need enough time to reflect and discuss the content of a presentation. Another approach is not to have speakers at every meeting so that the routine business of the Commission can be dealt with. Fran suggested that we could also do any business needed before a speaker comes so the rest of the meeting could be devoted to the speaker.

8. Fran brought up the fact that the Commission operates without a budget which limits our activities. Cheryl agreed to work on a request to the selectmen. Janet and Connie offered to work with Cheryl. Hildy mentioned that the Council on Aging has a work-study student. If the HRC had a student, we would need to have tasks for them and supervision.

9. Fran also introduced the idea of subcommittees as a more efficient and focused way to do the work of the commission. She suggested publicity/outreach and programs as two areas where there is a need.

10. Janet volunteered to send to each member a copy of the Impediments and Recommendations that pertain to Belmont.

11. Fran mentioned that the Anti-Defamation League was having its annual banquet on Thursday, November 30th and No Place for Hate communities were each given two free tickets to attend. Fran plans to attend and she invited someone to join her. Cheryl expressed interest in attending also.

12. The meeting adjourned at 9 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Connie Williams